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CUBA: THE SUCCESSFUL INSURGENCY

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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# ABSTRACT

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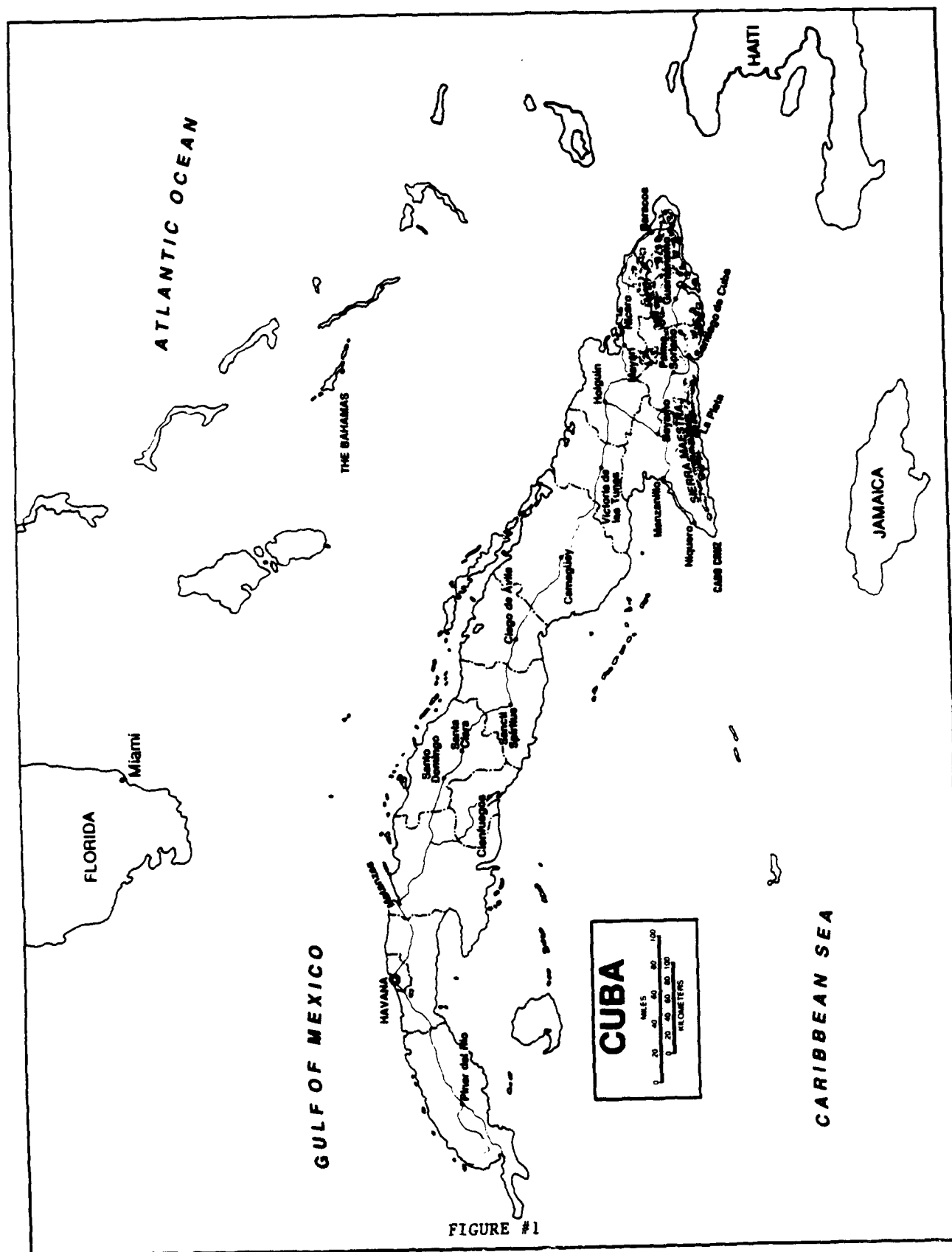
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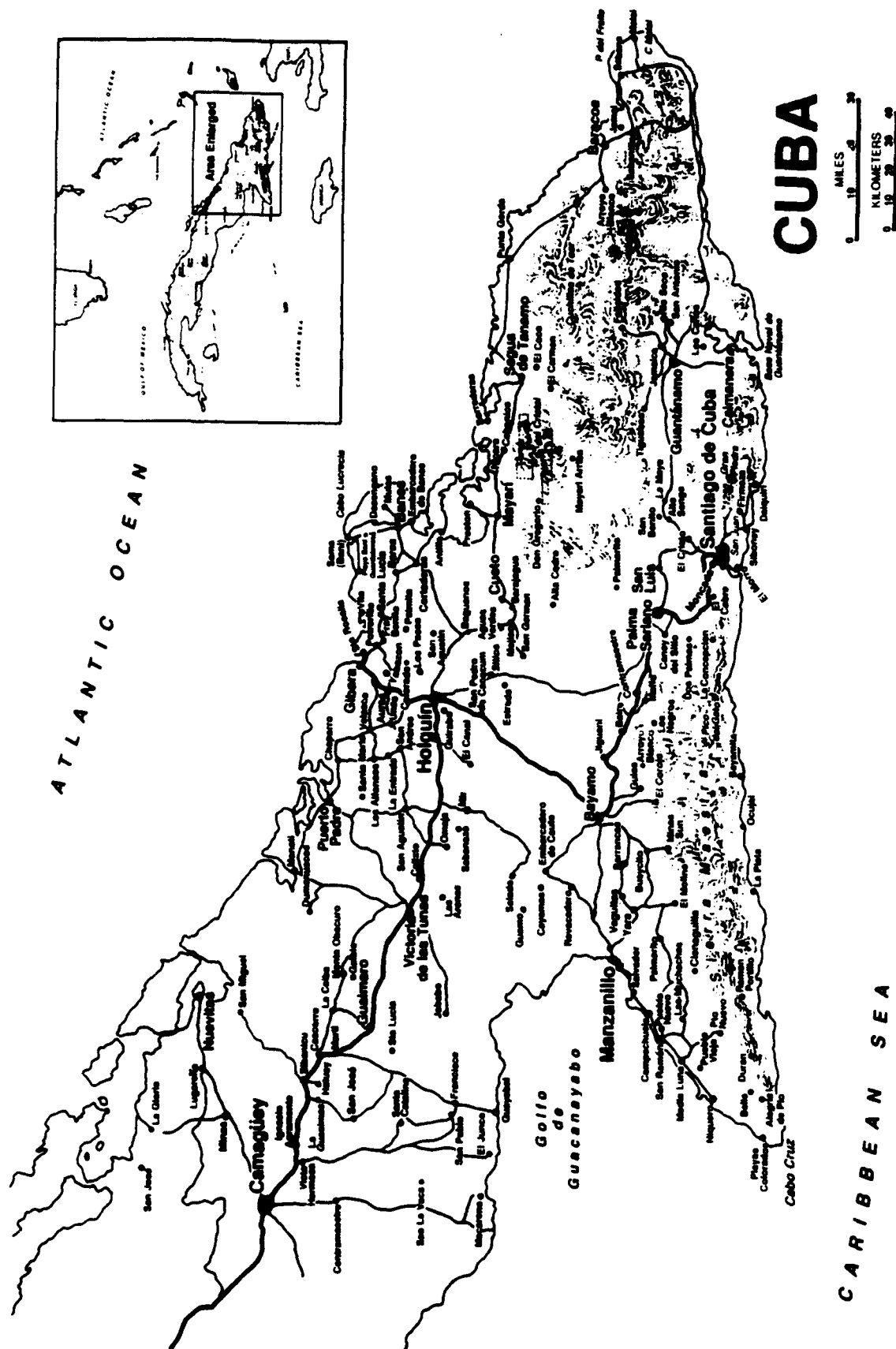
Map of Cuba

Figure #1

Map of Oriente Province

Figure #2





**FIGURE #2**

## INTRODUCTION

We are living in a world that is rapidly shifting from a state of cold war superpower confrontation to one in which developing third world countries and their peoples struggle to define their role in the "new world order". Within this environment, the potential for low intensity conflict will increase dramatically. In consonance with the theory that the study of history lends form and structure to our prognosis of the future, it is appropriate to review both the success and failure of previous insurgencies and counterinsurgencies. The Cuban Revolution of the mid-1950's can arguably be classified as a successful insurgency.

Any government regardless of how instituted must perform certain functions in order to maintain its legitimate right to rule. Those functions include the protection of the people and their national territory; provision of infrastructure services; and, sustainment of an economic environment in which the populace can achieve an acceptable standard of living. When a government fails to provide and secure those basic services it forfeits its legitimacy. Likewise, a group attempting to violently overthrow a government must establish within the minds of the people a certainty that its rule will satisfy the legitimate needs of the nation. In the Cuban Revolution, the center of gravity for the Batista government was the legitimacy of its right to rule the people of Cuba; and, in attacking that center of gravity, Fidel Castro was able to succeed in achieving his goals. While it was necessary for Castro to establish his own legitimacy, the key to the fall of Batista was his failure to destroy the insurgency while maintaining the legitimate right to rule. Its important to remember that the legitimacy of opposing

elements are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but it was Batista's failure to maintain his that led to his downfall.

This study examines the Cuban insurgency from Fidel Castro's initial attempt at a mass uprising at Moncada Barracks at Santiago de Cuba in 1953 through President Fulgencio Batista's hasty departure from Cuba on 1 January 1959. Presented from the insurgent point of view, the case study focuses on the military aspects of the revolution while integrating key political and economic factors where they had a direct impact on the eventual outcome of the conflict.



## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

"The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time  
to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.

It is its natural manure." Thomas Jefferson, 13 Nov 1787

In order to understand the nature of the Cuban Revolution of the mid-1950's, it is essential to recognize that Cuba had been at war with itself for virtually all of its history to 1959. From 1492 with the discovery of Cuba by Christopher Columbus until the Spanish-American War of 1898, Spain ruled and dominated Cuba.<sup>1</sup> Cuba served as Spain's primary staging base as it set out to explore and claim the New World of the Western Hemisphere. This purpose later evolved to include the development of agricultural products such as coffee and sugar. The production of these crops led to the use of slaves; first the Indian, then the Black. The use of slaves on the Cuban sugar plantations continued until 1886.<sup>2</sup> This use of slaves also initiated Cuba's legacy of revolution. As the Indians and, later, the blacks attempted to secure their freedom from their masters, the spirit of armed insurrection became instilled in the individual later to become the native Cuban.

Spain was not Cuba's only dominant partner. The United States has been linked to the island of Cuba since the American Revolution and, in fact, became their primary trading partner during the period of 1818 until 1960.<sup>3</sup> U.S. interests in Cuba were primarily economic based but extended to the political and military spheres as necessary to maintain the commercial status quo. In the eyes of many Cuban historians, Cuba

was a de facto colony of the United States from 1898 until the Castro take over in 1959. After Spain's departure from the scene in 1898, this relationship was virtually assured with the implementation of the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 and later reenforced by the Platt Amendment of 1901.

The 30 years prior to the Spanish American War was a period of almost continuous revolution on the island and, according to Latin historians, in fact represented the initial and most important phase of the Cuban-Spanish-American War. This period was initiated by the Ten Years War of 1868-1878 which, although unsuccessful, gave birth to a new generation of Cuban guerrilla fighter. The guerrillas now consisted of Spanish-Cuban land owners as well as the Indians and Blacks of previous insurrections.<sup>4</sup> It also began a transformation on the island from a predominately rural focus to an urban one as small farms began to be consumed by large sugar plantations and the displaced moved to the cities. This war was followed by a much shorter lived event called the "Little War" in 1879-1880. The significance of this war was that it was conceived, organized, and launched from the United States.<sup>5</sup> This was not to be unique in that both the Cuban Revolution of the 1950's and the counterrevolution of 1961 were heavily supported by sympathizers in the U.S.

The final attempt at organized revolt prior to the Spanish American War occurred in 1895 and was led by Jose Marti. Although Marti was killed shortly after hostilities commenced in the battle at Dos Rios on 19 May 1895,<sup>6</sup> his writings and thoughts on Cuban independence from foreign domination solidified the philosophical basis for all future independence movements. The independence he sought was from Spain but his real concern seemed to be with American economic influence.<sup>7</sup> At

this point in history, the U.S. was becoming a major landholder and owner in the Cuban sugar industry. From a U.S. viewpoint, the constant civil unrest and violence was beginning to have a major impact on sugar production and it became clear that Spain would have to be replaced with a popular, Cuban government.

The United State Congress declared war on Spain on 25 April 1898, after the sinking of the USS Maine in Havana Harbor in February of the same year.<sup>8</sup> The Cuban Independence Army operating in the countryside of Cuba quickly joined forces with the U.S. and fought with the Americans through out the war. This effort was coordinated by a government in exile located in the U.S. and headed by a future President of Cuba named Tomas Estrada Palma.<sup>9</sup> There were few battles of any major importance and Spain sued for peace on 12 August 1898. As a result of this war Cuba gained its independence from Spain and the U.S. gained Puerto Rico, Philippines, and a variety of islands in the Pacific and West Indies. Public opinion in both the United States and the world hailed this as an American victory and gave no recognition to the major contributions of the Cuban revolutionary movement of the current war or the preceding revolutionary struggles. This proved to be a critically sore point in future U.S. and Cuban relations.<sup>10</sup>

Once Cuba was free from Spanish domination for the first time in its history, the U.S. installed an American military governor. Under U.S. guidance, Cuba attempted to construct an electoral system that could have provided for a democratic process to emerge from Colonial rule. However, this process repeatedly failed and produced a series of elected presidents who failed miserably to institutionalize the system. The general cause for failure was their desire to perpetuate their own influence in national affairs.<sup>11</sup>

In preparation for democracy, the Cuban national assembly produced a national constitution in 1901. At the same time in the United States, the military budget was being passed in the U.S. Congress. An amendment to the budget bill was added which called for direct involvement in Cuban affairs. The Platt amendment was approved by the U.S. Congress and subsequently added to the Cuban Constitution on 12 June 1901.<sup>12</sup> The Platt amendment as incorporated in the Cuban Constitution contained several interesting provisions: the right to intervene with internal affairs to protect U.S. lives and property; negotiate foreign treaties; and establish permanent U.S. military bases.<sup>13</sup> Given the extensive nature of U.S. business interests in Cuba at that time, this provision basically guaranteed the right of the American government to intervene at will.

The period of 1902 to 1933 saw a mixed bag of Cuban Presidents and U.S. intervention to prevent open revolution. The last and possibly one of the most corrupt was General Gerardo Machado who served in office from 1925 until overthrown in 1933. The extent of corruption and graft reached such proportions his government was finally driven from office by a combination of student protests and a general strike that virtually stopped the country.<sup>14</sup> The success of this strike was to never be duplicated again even by the Castro revolution. In the midst of this turmoil and confusion, a sergeant by the name of Fulgencio Batista Zaldivar arose to power.

Batista was a court stenographer in Cuba's principle military installation at Camp Columbia. On 4 September 1933, a sergeants' revolt led by Batista succeeded in seizing control of the military establishment. By assuring the U.S. Ambassador, Sumner Welles, that he

fully supported U.S. interests as well as the Cuban business class, he quickly gained the necessary support to effectively achieve complete control of the governmental systems.<sup>15</sup> With Machado's departure from the scene, the populace selected a five man council to temporarily govern Cuba until a president could be selected. From this council, Ramon Grau San Martin was chosen as the Cuban President on 10 September 1933. Batista, the power broker, felt that Grau was too extreme in his advocacy of a social revolution which focused on worker's rights and nationalism. This trend had potentially disastrous effects on Cuban American business interests.<sup>16</sup> In January of 1934, Grau departed Cuba for exile. Also in 1934, the Platt amendment was repealed under President Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor" policy and, with the exception of the U.S.'s right to maintain the naval base at Guantanamo, Cuba was free to develop its own destiny.<sup>17</sup>

General Batista was elected to the office of President in 1940 and was to serve until 1944. The power coalition he put together is perhaps strange and somewhat ironical. He formed an alliance of the labor unions, the Cuban Communist Party, and the military establishment.<sup>18</sup> He also had the backing of various student groups. Despite the many claims to the contrary, the communist party had little to do with the Castro revolution until after 1960. Another significant event occurred in 1940. The Cuban assembly developed a new, all encompassing constitution. It was an extensive document containing 286 articles that among other things guaranteed a multitude of human rights and benefits. It contained provisions for land distribution to the peasants, free education and health care, minimum wages, and equality of all peoples of color.<sup>19</sup> It was this document and its human rights provisions that

Fidel Castro would invoke as a rallying cry for the Cuban Revolution of the 1950's.

Actually the 1940 to 1944 term of office in which Batista served was a prosperous one for Cuba. Roads, schools, and infrastructure systems were built and Cuba enjoyed a period of relative calm and stability. In 1944, Batista willingly departed the Presidency and retired to Florida.<sup>20</sup> He was followed by Ramon Grau serving the term 1944-1948 and Carlos Prío Socarras serving 1948-1952.<sup>21</sup> Throughout both terms corruption, graft, and a variety of criminal activities flourished within Cuba.

By 1952, Batista had once again returned to Cuba and was actively campaigning for the Presidency.<sup>22</sup> As election time neared, Batista who was running in third place in the pre-election polls opted for a more direct method of securing the top leadership position. With the support of the Cuban Army's junior officers, on 10 March 1952, he again seized control of the military headquarters at Camp Columbia.<sup>23</sup> Faced with this development the incumbent president stepped down and Batista became the President. Having attained the position through force, he realized the immediate threat posed by an upset and volatile populace. He immediately cancelled the upcoming elections, dissolved the congress, and suspended constitutional rights.<sup>24</sup>

A young lawyer by the name of Fidel Castro had intended to run for a congressional seat during the 1952 elections; but, with the elections cancelled this possibility was gone. Through the courts, Castro attempted to have Batista removed and the elections re-instituted.<sup>25</sup> He failed to accomplish his aims in the courts; therefore, he elected to achieve his purpose through other means.

To fully understand the background for revolution in Cuba, it is essential to recognize the economic reality which existed in Cuba in 1953. The sugar industry was the dominant force in the economic arena and its influence extended into every aspect of Cuban culture. While sugar was the dominant economic force, the United States was the dominant force in the Cuban sugar industry. It is beyond the scope of this case study to fully explore the impact this had; however, a U.S. Commerce Department pamphlet published in 1956 indicates the problem.

"The only foreign investments of importance are those of the United States, American participation exceeds 90 percent in the telephone and electric services, about 50 percent in public service railways, and roughly 40 percent in raw sugar production. The Cuban branches of the United States banks are entrusted with almost one-fourth of all bank deposits . . . The outlook for additional investments is also good."<sup>26</sup>

Co-existing with U.S. ownership of a good deal of the Cuban economy was a very wealthy Cuban upper class who, at all costs desired to maintain the status quo. It was the members of an emerging middle class that saw themselves being squeezed out of the process. In this economic environment, it was very difficult to achieve a social standing and quality of life commensurate with the expectations of an educated middle class.<sup>27</sup> It was from this middle class that the Cuban Revolution of the 1950's was spawned and from it came the vast majority of its support throughout the war. Despite the almost continuous claims of Castro that the revolution was one of the peasant masses, reality

simply demonstrates otherwise. This is a condition which can be seen in subsequent revolutions around the world.



## PHASE I PREPARATIONS FOR REVOLUTION

This study of the Cuban Revolution begins with a review of Castro's attack on Moncada Barracks in Southeastern Cuba in 1953. Moncada Barracks was situated in Santiago de Cuba on the Island's southern most Caribbean coast and considered to be the second most important military installation in Cuba. Although over three years would lapse before the M26 revolutionaries would return to Cuba and land at Playa de los Colorados to initiate the armed conflict phases of the revolt, Moncada was a key event in that it served as a focal point for the mobilization of subversive political action.<sup>28</sup> The date of that attack, 26 July 1953, remains as Cuba's principle holiday to this day.<sup>29</sup> Castro's revolution was to become known as the 26 of July Revolutionary Movement-M26.<sup>30</sup>

The attack on Moncada was the result of months of preparation on the part of a variety of groups composed primarily of working class men, students, and young professionals. Castro's strategy was to seize the weapons and munitions contained in the barracks armory and arm a population waiting to be freed. With this armed populace, Castro intended to establish Santiago as his capitol and from there spread his revolution through out Cuba.<sup>31</sup> He made the assumption that the people of the region would follow his lead into a general uprising. Due to the failure of the attack itself it will never be known if Castro's assumption was valid; however, in the campaign of 1956-1959 a planned general strike or mass uprising was never accomplished. It's doubtful that it would have occurred in 1953.

Castro's tactical plan was fairly well conceived however there were several flaws in battlefield preparation and execution. The basic plan called for an initial seizure of one of four gates into the compound and followed up immediately by an assault through the gate to capture the troops anticipated to be sleeping in the barracks buildings. With the compound secure, the armory was to be emptied of its weapons. Those weapons were to be used to replace the shotguns and pistols carried by the attackers with the remainder being distributed among the general populace. Supporting the main effort was a group led by Raul Castro and seven others. Their mission was to occupy the Justice Building next to the barracks and provide covering fire from its rooftop onto a machinegun position believed to be on top of the Moncada Officers Club. Another group which was led by Castro's second in command, Abel Santamaria, was to seize the hospital. The rear of the hospital was thought to provide a good covering fire position for the barrack's parade ground. Also with Santamaria were two nurses and one doctor to care for the anticipated wounded rebels and government soldiers.<sup>32</sup>

A supporting attack on the Carlos Manuel de Cespedes Garrison in Bayamo was planned to occur simultaneous to the one at Moncada. The purpose of that attack was to block an anticipated counterattack by government troops located at Holguin.<sup>33</sup> Both attacks were scheduled for 0515 hours on 26 July. That specific date was selected because the period 25-27 July was carnival time and troop alertness was expected to be low.

The attack failed. The operation was initiated at the appointed time and Gate No.3 was seized as planned. Both supporting efforts were

equally as successful however those locations were not as suitable for covering fire as originally anticipated. In contrast the main body, minus an element consisting of approximately 45 rebels who had gotten lost as they entered the city, met with disaster from the outset. As this group approached Gate No.3, they were halted by a random army patrol armed with machineguns; and the engagement ensued. Since the plan had called for dismounting the vehicles inside the compound, the confusion caused by the disruption led to disaster. Although a portion of the rebels did penetrate the compound for a short period, Moncada was never seriously threatened and a disorganized retreat ensued.<sup>34</sup> The attack at Bayamo was equally as unsuccessful and resulted in about ten rebel casualties.<sup>35</sup>

In a later interview, Castro made the following observation, "I think that the main reason for the failure of our tactics was that we should not have split our well-trained commando unit. We divided up our best men and most daring leaders . . ."<sup>36</sup> While that was a significant factor, several other factors may be considered to have added to the defeat. There is no evidence that a leader's reconnaissance was conducted of the routes, the compound, or the supporting positions. No thought was given to infiltrating selected individuals into key areas prior to the assault; everything hinged on timing and unimpeded movement. No contingency plan or withdrawal plan was developed. Intelligence was also proven to be faulty. Despite Castro's belief that Moncada was garrisoned by up to 1000 soldiers, later analysis indicates that 374 soldiers of the Maceo Regiment No.1 of the regular army and 26 men of Squadron 18 of the Rural Guard were present at the time of the attack.<sup>37</sup>

Castro lost the battle and failed to attain his objective; however, the aftermath of the battle would provide him a major strategic victory. The rebels reportedly lost five KIA and four WIA during the attack on Moncada. Government losses were put at 22 KIA and 57 WIA.<sup>38</sup> Although accounts vary, the total number of rebels killed appears to be in range of 70 to 90.<sup>39</sup> The bulk of those killed are reported to have died at their time of capture or during subsequent interrogation and torture. News of atrocities quickly spread and prompted a great deal of public outcry. This grew to the extent that Batista proclaimed a 90 day state of siege in order to outlaw public demonstrations.<sup>40</sup> The damage done to the legitimacy of Batista's government was later proven to be far greater than the damage inflicted by the rebel attack.

Both Fidel and Raul Castro escaped execution and were tried and imprisoned later in the fall. Fidel was sentenced to serve 15 years; his brother 13. In the eyes of many, the publicity gained through the aftermath of the attack and the subsequent trial elevated Castro to a status of revolutionary hero. However by 1955, the public outcry over Moncada had died down to the extent that Batista felt sufficiently secure to make the magnanimous gesture of releasing all political prisoners including Fidel Castro and the remaining veterans of Moncada. This was clearly an act he would later regret.<sup>41</sup>

In July 1956, Castro departed Cuba to self-imposed exile in Mexico. It was here that the groundwork was laid for the future revolution. The M26 movement was proclaimed and resources were gathered to develop and train a rebel army. Coincidental to the emergence of the M26 army, an urban subversive group made up of students and young professionals also developed under the title of M26.<sup>42</sup>

Although not under the direct command of the M26 army initially, Castro became the governing power for both organizations. This element was to become the primary supplier, recruiter, and supporting arm of the M26 army.

In the general amnesty under which Castro was released, many political dissidents who had previously departed Cuba began to return. Predictably, antigovernment violence began to increase and, correspondingly, government control likewise took a violent turn. During this period the M26 urban element began developing its underground networks under the leadership of Frank Pais.<sup>43</sup> In some sources, this M26 element is referred to as the Resistencia Civica. Initially, the M26 urban element was focused in the Santiago area, but it is important to remember that it was only one of many underground groups operating within Cuba in opposition to Batista. Another major contributor to the Castro revolution was the Revolutionary Student Directorate (DER) which had been operating in one form or another since the 1930's. This was one group that actively supported Batista's overthrow of the Machado government.<sup>44</sup> However, disillusionment with Batista's return and subsequent coup turned the DER violently against him.

At this point in the case study it is appropriate to briefly review the Cuban military and government forces that worked in opposition to the revolution. There were three primary forces applied against the various insurgent elements: the Army, the Navy, and the Military Intelligence Service (SIM).

The Army consisted of eight regiments, each of which was posted in one of the six provincial capitols. The two remaining regiments were

stationed with one in Havana and one in Holguin. As a side note, Oriente province where M26 would establish its base had two assigned regiments. Typically each regiment positioned one battalion at the regimental headquarters and the other two were broken down into company and platoon size elements which were posted in the various small towns and villages of the province. The Army also possessed a small number of tanks which were attached to the regimental headquarters.<sup>45</sup>

The Navy was equipped for coastal action only and possessed a limited number of ships and patrol boats. Both the Navy and the Army maintained a small number of aircraft suitable for reconnaissance and close support missions.<sup>46</sup>

The third government service was the SIM. This was an independent intelligence organization of which little is known but it appears to have worked directly for the Cuban Chief of Staff and Batista. Its focus was on internal security and it played a key role in rooting out and destroying underground cells. LTC Jose Salas, commander of SIM in Santiago was credited with killing Frank Pais in July 1957.<sup>47</sup> Because of its atrocities, it served to focus hatred against the Batista regime.

The Cuban military was largely funded by the U.S. During the decade of the 50's the U.S. provided \$15,694,000 in funds and military equipment to the Cuban government.<sup>48</sup> This support lasted until 2 April 1958 when all military aid to Cuba was to be cancelled due to growing opposition in the U.S. to Batista's brutal methods in dealing with the rebel threat.

## PHASE II GUERRILLA WARFARE

After 15 months of training, preparation, and planning, 82 rebels of the M26 Army set out under the cover of darkness and bad weather to begin the overthrow of the Batista regime. Fidel Castro's second attempt at revolution was initiated on 25 November 1956 with the departure of the seagoing cruiser "Granma" from Tuxpan, Mexico.<sup>49</sup>

The M26 campaign plan was again predicated on a mass uprising and the rapid seizure of Oriente Province as the first step to a country wide revolt. Castro's plan called for a successful landing near Niquero on the 30th of November and a linkup with an additional 100 armed rebels. This combined group would then march on to Niquero and seize a number of small Army garrisons for the purpose of securing additional arms and ammunition. These provisions were required in order to arm a general populace that was anticipated to rise to the call of freedom.<sup>50</sup> In addition to organizing the activities at Niquero, the M26 urban element was to incite rioting, sabotage, and bombings in both Santiago and Holguin.<sup>51</sup> Each of these cities contained a Cuban Army regimental headquarters and at least one battalion which would have to be preoccupied with local circumstances for the overall plan to work.

The "Granma" failed to arrive on schedule and the planned operation never had a chance. During daylight hours on 2 December, the cruiser finally reached Cuba and ran aground in the mangrove swamps near Playa de las Coloradas. As it beached, it was spotted by a Cuban Navy aircraft and the M26 Army was to spend the next three days struggling through the swamps trying to find their way out and avoid further detection.<sup>52</sup> During this process the rebels managed to lose most of their equipment, supplies, and heavy weapons.

The riots and bombings in Holguin and Santiago would have been effective if everything else had gone as planned. Frank Pais and his underground cells generated a great deal of confusion but could not maintain the pressure beyond a couple of days. However, the government's reaction would provide Castro with yet another political victory. The local commander in Holguin, Col Fermin Cowley, arrested and killed 22 young adults suspected of taking part in the uprising in that city. Several of the youths were found hanging from trees on Christmas Day.<sup>53</sup> These executions were intended as a warning against future subversive activity; but, they simply served as an embarrassment to the government and further aggravated the general populace. Although capital punishment was outlawed in the 1940 Cuban Constitution, this was a cycle to be repeated throughout the war. An M26 urban element or army attack would inevitably result in government reprisals against any young person suspected of subversive activity; this would be followed by a further public outrage and mistrust of the Batista government.

On 5 December, the M26 Army of 81 worked their way out of the swamps and arrived at Alegria de Pio, near Cape Cruz, exhausted and out of food. At this point, there appeared to have been no security or concern for the government aircraft constantly flying overhead in an effort to find the rebels. The rebel group spread out in a sugarcane field to chew the cane and rest. After several hours in this location, the group was attacked from the ground and air in its first combat with government troops. The M26 Army was decimated. The Cuban Army had surrounded the rebels, poured weapons fire into the area, and set the cane fields on fire. In the confusion, only 12 rebels were to escape death or subsequent capture and form the nucleus of the M26 Army of the



Sierra Maestra. A few others would escape and join M26 urban elements operating in the cities.<sup>54</sup>

The fog of war which was to plague the government the entire war quickly set in. Based on information provided by the government, the United Press International reported that Fidel Castro had been killed in the action at Alegria de Pio. Batista was to continue repeating this allegation until the late spring of the following year. Cuban Army lieutenant Aquiles Chinae at the scene reported attacking about 200 well armed men while killing four. In his dispatch to higher headquarters, he asserted that Castro must have escaped.<sup>55</sup> Reports of Castro's death were to occur periodically throughout the war.

With the failure of his plan and the destruction of a majority of his army, Castro was now forced into a classical guerrilla war. Once the 12 remaining members of the M26 Army assembled in the Sierra Maestra, they began preparing for future operations. Their most immediate problems centered on food, weapons, ammunition, and training. Initially the inhabitants of the area wanted nothing to do with Castro and his men and believed them to be another struggling guerrilla band with little chance for success. Despite this lack of support Castro and his men were careful to pay for all provisions obtained from the local inhabitants. The action was crucial in the M26 Army establishing its credibility as a legitimate alternative to Batista in the later stages of the conflict. Training became a primary concern for the M26 Army as the realization set in that this was to be a protracted war requiring many small victories versus the mass uprisings hoped for at Moncada and Niquero.

The first offensive action of the M26 Army occurred at La Plata on

the southern coast of the Sierra Maestra on 17 January 1957. Castro's force attacked a small Cuban Army detachment of 15 housed in a single barracks building. The tactics used in this attack would be repeated often during this early stage of the war. After being guided to the Army barracks by local peasants during daylight hours, the rebels established continuous surveillance of the site. At 0240 hours, M26 attacked on three sides of the barracks. The rebels fired into the building for a period of time and then asked the government soldiers to surrender. When they refused such demands, the rebels would again commence firing. The process was repeated until the resistance ceased or the rebels set fire to the building and shot the soldiers as they attempted to escape. As a result of this engagement, M26 netted eight rifles, a sub-machinegun, ammunition, and food. For a short period of time there would be more weapons than rebels.<sup>56</sup> Again the fog of war set in, a government report on this action published in March stated that 40 rebels had been killed and 12 captured.<sup>57</sup> With press censorship in place, there was no one to reconcile this report with one issued in December that declared the total destruction of Castro's rebels.

Another important precedent was set during this initial engagement. After this battle or any battle in which the rebels were successful, the wounded government soldiers would receive medical treatment and be released along with the remainder of the POW's. The opposite of such treatment was the expectation of any rebel or urban insurgent captured in battle.<sup>57</sup>

M26 conducted several small scale attacks and ambushes during the next few weeks. The aim of each was to capture arms and supplies. The

rebel army was slowly growing and beginning to gain support from the local inhabitants of the area. Although they were not dramatic in action or results, these attacks in combination with the disturbances generated by the various urban underground cells were beginning to cause great frustration within the government.

During this period, one of the recent enlistees turned spy and M26 experienced several close calls. On 30 January, the M26 base camp at Caracus Hill was bombed and strafed causing the group to temporarily scatter.<sup>58</sup> Again on 7 February at Altos de Espinosa, a base camp which had been evacuated only hours earlier was subjected to ground attack.<sup>59</sup> This spy had also been directed to kill Castro but he never made the attempt despite being in close contact with him almost constantly. The spy made several mistakes in communicating with the Cuban Army and was soon compromised and executed by the rebels. The rebel code which applied to soldiers and local inhabitants equally provided for capital punishment for informing, rape, and murder.

Both the air and ground attacks could have had disastrous effects if they had been followed up aggressively. Instead the government simply declared victory. General Tabernilla, Cuba's Chief of Staff, announced on 7 March that M26 had effectively been destroyed.<sup>60</sup> Castro actually reinforced that notion by slowing the action.

In March, Frank Pais and the M26 urban element established contact with the M26 Army and began shipping arms and recruits to the Sierra Maestra.<sup>61</sup> The months of March through May were used to train and reorganize the guerrilla force. A concerted effort was also put forward to win favor with the local inhabitants of the region and expand M26's influence within the Sierra Maestra. To date, M26 Army's area of

influence was generally on the southern slopes of the Sierra Maestra from LaPlata to Bayamita.

A significant event occurred in Havana on 13 March 1957. A student group not directly linked to M26 made an assassination attempt on Batista. A group of about 80 men from the Directorate of the Federation of University Students (FEU) attacked the Presidential Palace in Havana. Although Batista was present, he escaped to the third floor of the Palace where it was impossible to reach except by elevator. Simultaneous with this attack a radio station was seized and a message broadcast that claimed Batista was dead and the revolution had started.<sup>62</sup> The police and SIM went after FEU with a vengeance and a host of people were killed in the process. As in previous instances, public sympathy turned to the tortured and killed rather than the now somewhat beleaguered government of Batista. Ironically, Castro appears to have been against the assassination attempt. At this point in time, he feared a military takeover if Batista was killed. He was clearly not in position to seize power himself and he needed Batista to focus public attention.

By the end of May, the M26 Army numbered 127 moderately well armed men. Although some government patrolling occurred, engagements were generally confined to sniping attacks on the part of the rebels. During this period the Cuban Army made no serious attempts to penetrate the Sierra Maestra to hunt down the rebel forces.

The M26 general staff determined that training and preparations had reached a level that limited offensive operations could be initiated. Castro planned an attack on the sugar mill at El Uvero near Manzanillo on the southern coast. This mill was protected by an Army

garrison of approximately 50 soldiers under the command of a lieutenant. M26 used 80 men in the attack. This battle, which commenced on 28 May, lasted two and one-half hours and caused considerable casualties on both sides.<sup>63</sup> The rebels prevailed; but, more importantly it announced to the world that the M26 Army was alive and well and could pose a serious threat to isolated government units operating in the area. Following this attack, support for M26 increased from several sectors. The underground at Bayamo delivered to Castro another 20 plus armed rebels along with additional arms and supplies. Based on Bayamo's proximity to the Sierra Maestra rebel stronghold, it became a conduit for those wishing to join the rebel army.<sup>64</sup>

Almost simultaneous to the attack at El Uvero, the urban element attacked the electrical power grid in Havana. This was accomplished through the destruction of underground power cables and caused an almost total blackout for 54 hours.<sup>65</sup> This action was impossible for the government to hide and clearly indicated that an insurgency of significant proportions had developed. Immediately following the urban attack, the police and SIM reacted in typical fashion. A number of bodies were found hanging around the city.

In response to the El Uvero attack and, in all probability, the Havana attack as well, the Cuban Army developed a new campaign to destroy M26 in the Sierra Maestra. Within three days, the Army moved to isolate the rebel army from its civilian support. Although the Cuban Army had previously attempted to cordon off the region, this single tactic had been largely ineffective. The new plan called for relocating the indigenous population followed up by carpet bombing with high explosives and napalm.<sup>66</sup> In their eagerness to do well, the Cuban

Army got the sequence of action confused and immediately started the bombing campaign. Although some peasants were relocated to Santiago, more and more sought protection from M26.

On 30 July, M26 suffered a significant loss. Frank Pais was shot while attempting to avoid a police search following a series of terrorist attacks in Santiago.<sup>67</sup> Pais had constructed the M26 urban element in a cellular fashion so that the destruction of one cell would have little effect on the others; but, the impact of his death was nevertheless felt.

During the summer months of 1957, the M26 Army had attained a strength of around 200 men. This allowed them to begin operating in "columns" of 20 to 30 men each. These columns would either conduct independent, small operations or join together for large scale attacks.

In July and August, a series of small attacks were conducted on the periphery of the Sierra Maestra. A column led by Fidel Castro attacked at El Hombrito. Guevara led attacks at Bueycito and Pino del Agua. Raul Castro attacked at Estrada Palma.<sup>68</sup> These and several similar attacks were typically aimed at small garrisons or government convoys with the number of Cuban Army soldiers involved usually amounting to only 15 to 20. There was little military significance to these actions. However, the combined effect of the Cuban Army's inability to destroy M26 and the government's anti-rebel terrorist campaign in the cities began to create disillusionment and dissatisfaction within not only the civilian sector but the Cuban military itself.

On 5 September 1957, an uprising at the naval installation at Cienfuegos was attempted by a coalition of junior, Cuban Navy officers

and M26 urban elements. The conspiracy appears to have involved many naval officers stationed throughout Cuba but in the final moment the only armed activity occurred at Cienfuegos. Several hundred rebels and navy personnel initially seized both the naval station and the city. The Cuban Army's reaction was immediate and overwhelming. Both the city and the navy base were attacked by aircraft and infantry/armor ground forces.<sup>69</sup> Interestingly, Colonel Tabernilla the Army/Air Force commander was awarded the U.S. Legion of Merit for the bombing operation.<sup>70</sup> Again, the Cuban Army won a tactical victory only to suffer a strategic defeat. The killing continued long after the engagement ended. Claims were made that some 600 bodies were dumped into a mass grave. A "Chicago Tribune" correspondent claimed to have witnessed a portion of the burial. The World Medical Association claimed to have evidence that 200 of the wounded had been buried alive.<sup>71</sup> Whether these claims were true or not the damage was done. Terrorism was not confined to the government. In November of that year, Colonel Cowley was assassinated by an M26 urban element in Holguin. Due to his close relationship to Batista, the execution and subsequent funeral drew tremendous press coverage.<sup>72</sup>

Throughout the fall and early winter months, the operational pattern of the M26 Army continued to focus on attacking small installations along the perimeter of the Sierra Maestra and ambushing Cuban Army convoys attempting to relieve government installations under siege. Both in September and again in December, M26 columns ambushed large government convoys at Veguitas (midway between Manzanillo and Bayamo) and Palma Mocha inflicting significant casualties.<sup>73</sup> The tempo of battle was beginning to increase measurably. During this

period, the M26 Army had expended its area of influence over the western two-thirds of the Sierra Maestra bounded generally by Bayamita, Cape Cruz, Niquero, Manzanillo, and Bayamo. None of those cities were under rebel control, but interior to those boundaries the area was virtually uncontested by the government.

The operations of M26 by late 1957 had expanded to the point that Fidel Castro could no longer control the rebel army and fight his own column at the same time. A permanent M26 headquarters was established in a small village in the Sierra Maestra near Pico Turquino. Additionally, the rebels began to establish schools, medical clinics, and shops to support M26 and the inhabitants of the region.<sup>74</sup>



### PHASE III MANEUVER

The third phase of the revolution can be characterized as one of maneuver and counter-maneuver. Although the rebel army would never grow much beyond battalion size strength, it achieved great success within the context of a nation at war with itself. It wasn't until after Castro's seizure of power that he gained the full support of the population of Cuba; but, even at this stage of the conflict the people were becoming united in their opposition to Batista.

During this phase the political, economic, and military elements of power were brought to bear. Starting in November and continuing through January, M26 urban elements began a campaign to economically cripple the Batista government.<sup>75</sup> The primary target was the sugar crop. Sugar cane fields were torched; warehouses were attacked and burned; and where possible Cuban Army barracks protecting the large sugar plantations came under constant M26 Army pressure to withdraw. Castro relented on burning sugar cane fields due to an outcry of peasant farmers but pressure on other economic targets continued. In addition to sugar, tobacco warehouses were burned, oil refineries and storage tanks were hit; water and electrical supplies were disrupted; and, public transportation systems in all but the major cities were periodically interdicted.<sup>76</sup>

In the political arena, several attempts were made to consolidate the various revolutionary movements. The two most important occurred in Miami on 1 November 1957 and in Caracas, Venezuela 9-10 July 1958. Castro was not consulted prior to the Miami meeting and immediately repudiated the results. The one in July was far more to his liking.

His nominee for the position of provisional president was selected and he himself was named as chief of all revolutionary armies. Although this consolidation was never functional in the field, it took away all doubt as to who would be in power in post-revolutionary Cuba.<sup>77</sup> All opposition parties were represented at the Caracas meeting except the Cuban communist party. They had not yet recognized Castro as the future of Cuba, and Castro wished to distance himself from that group to discredit Batista's continuous claims that this was a communist insurgency.

In Havana the political heat was also being applied to the Batista regime from other groups. The Catholic Church took the position that a new government was required.<sup>78</sup> The middle and upper middle class were throwing their support to those in opposition to Batista. They found Batista and his inability to deal with the rebels without resort to terror an embarrassment. The constant turmoil was wreaking havoc on the economy and thus effected all elements of society.

During the fall of 1957, Batista announced that general elections would be held in June of 1958 and he would leave office. To demonstrate real sincerity in this gesture, he further announced that he would personally finance the campaigns of his opposition.<sup>79</sup> Due to the intensity of combat in the following Spring, the elections were postponed until November. However, by then it was too little, too late.

A newspaper, "El Cubano Libre", and a radio station were established by M26 in the Sierra Maestra in February 1958.<sup>80</sup> These tools became very valuable assets in furthering the revolutionary cause. The only difference in the dis-information campaigns run by Batista and Castro was that Castro's was more plausible. Small rebel victories were

made to sound large. Small rebel columns moving out of the Sierras were announced to be armies. Government reprisals and atrocities, somewhat embellished, were made known throughout Cuba. These reports were also to have a major effect on U.S. public opinion. With a sometimes censored and consistently hostile press, Batista had nothing to counter these weapons. A further complication experienced by the Batista government occurred in mid-March when the U.S. Government placed an embargo on all arms sales to Cuba.<sup>81</sup> This move, sponsored by several U.S. Congressmen, gave even more credence to Castro's assertion that the Batista government had lost the legitimate right to rule.

Fidel Castro made his final attempt at a mass uprising with a general strike scheduled for 9 April 1958.<sup>82</sup> For a variety of reasons this strike failed and all concerned became committed to overthrowing Batista by force of arms.

During this phase of the war, other rebel groups took to the hills to conduct guerrilla warfare. The most notable of these was the "Second Front of Escambray" which conducted its operations in Las Villas province from early January 1958 until the conclusion of the revolution. The primary focus of this guerrilla force was the destruction of government forces. Apparently successful attacks occurred around Santi Spiritus, Trinidad, and Cienfuegos. Interestingly, one key leader of the organization was a U.S. Marine combat veteran by the name of William Morgan. Although not operating under the control of Castro's M26, they shared a common cause and joined with a column led by Che Guevara to attack Santa Clara later in the war.<sup>83</sup>

On 27 February 1958, Castro issued a communique from his headquarters in the Sierra Maestra which established a second front in

the Sierra Cristal mountains of northeast Oriente Province. Commanded by Raul Castro, Column 6 was directed to conduct operations over a rather large area bounded by Mayari in the west to Baracoa in the east. An important feature of that communique was the order for all elements in rebellion within the operational area to place themselves under Raul Castro's command.<sup>84</sup> This was another clear indicator that Fidel Castro saw himself as the principal among the leaders of the various groups in rebellion against Batista.

The Second Front under Raul Castro was one of the most successful operations M26 would mount during the revolution. Raul quickly gained control of all rebel elements operating in the area and, in fairly short order, cleaned out the area of all but the largest Cuban Army garrisons. Much like in the Sierra Maestra, schools, hospitals, and factory shops were established; a legal system with rebel police was set up; and, taxes were collected from the local inhabitants.<sup>85</sup> In conjunction with the Second Front, columns led by Che Guevara and Juan Almeida attacked from the northwest and west respectively to apply direct pressure on Santiago de Cuba. The noose was tightening around Cuba's second major city and, at this point, M26 had supplanted the Cuban government in a large portion of Oriente Province.

Castro again expanded his area of operation by announcing through a radio communique on 16 April that he had placed Camilo Cienfuegos in command of rebel activities in northern Oriente Province in an area bounded by Manzanillo, Victoria de las Tunas, and Holguin.<sup>86</sup> Despite Castro's attempts to deceive Batista into believing that he commanded a rebel army of thousands, the M26 Army strength by the end of March numbered approximately 400 armed rebels.<sup>87</sup> This figure does not include the hundreds working in the M26 urban elements.

The combined effects of increasing urban warfare, the setbacks on the political and economic fronts previously mentioned, and the loss of control of the countryside in Oriente Province, all combined to forced Batista into the realization that drastic action was required to save his regime. Although the rebels never fought a major set piece battle with the Cuban Army, the numerous small attacks and ambushes conducted by the rebels clearly indicated that the government was not winning. The rebels did not need military victories but only needed to demonstrate that the government could not secure the country side nor protect its lines of communication.

Throughout early 1958, the Cuban Army focused on securing the central highway, protecting the garrisons on the periphery of the provincial cities, and bombing villages and areas suspected of supporting rebel activities. However, on 24 May Batista launched a major offensive aimed at isolating and destroying the M26 Army in the Sierra Maestra. Guerrilla activities in the Escambray region and in the M26 Second Front area were largely ignored during the government offensive. Batista's strategy was simple. It called for surrounding the Sierra Maestra stronghold in the area of Pico Turquino and then driving battalion size forces into the area to destroy the rebel infrastructure and forces. He felt that the destruction of the M26 headquarters would cause the other "fronts" and the urban elements to collapse.<sup>88</sup>

Based on advance information concerning the government's offensive, Castro recalled the columns led by Guevara, Almeida, and Cienfuego into the Sierra Maestra.<sup>89</sup> These elements conducted a fighting withdrawal back into the hills. Also as a precautionary step,

the M26 urban element shipped all available supplies of medicine, ammunition, and food stocks to Castro.<sup>90</sup> In preparation for the battle to come, M26 built entrenched ambush sites, emplaced mines built from unexploded bombs, and dug numerous tank traps. Areas of responsibility were assigned but plans to concentrate at critical points appear to have been also developed.

Batista selected General Eulugio Cantillo as the commander of the Oriente offensive campaign who in turn established his headquarters at Bayamo. The Cuban Army in Oriente consisted of 14 infantry battalions, several separate companies, an artillery battalion, a tank battalion, and naval and air force support.<sup>91</sup> Sources vary on numbers of soldiers involved (4000-12000) but are fairly consistent on the number of units that took part in the operation. Although Castro only had between 400 and 500 soldiers, he did have short interior lines of communication; intimate knowledge of the terrain; a vast intelligence network in Oriente Province; and, most importantly his soldiers fought with the sure knowledge that the only alternative to victory was death at the hands of their captors.

General Cantillo initiated the attack at Las Mercedes on the northern side of the Sierra Maestra with two infantry battalions conducting what amounted to a movement to contact. A column led by Almeida constantly ambushed and sniped the advance guard of the unit drawing it deeper into the rugged terrain but never allowing a decisive action to occur. The Cuban Army commander allowed his unit to be drawn in with the hope that a major engagement could be fought but he failed to maintain a line of communication to his rear. Once the penetration reached a point where it could no longer be supported or reached by

motorized ground elements, the unit was surrounded by columns led by Castro and Guevara and literally shot to pieces over the course of the next week.<sup>92</sup> M26 forces never attacked by fire and maneuver but merely starved their enemy while shooting anything that moved. Attempts to breakout of the encirclement were met by ambushes and booby traps.

In addition to rendering two battalions combat ineffective, M26 also captured a large quantity of weapons and supplies; additionally, they captured radio equipment with the Cuban Army code book for the current period through 25 July.<sup>93</sup> From that point on, M26 was able to employ the full range of electronic warfare techniques against the Cuban Army. Subsequent captures allowed them to continue EW throughout the remainder of the war.

The sequence of events that occurred in the initial engagement was repeated several times over the course of the two month campaign. At no time did there appear to be an attempt to concentrate sufficient forces in a given area in order to penetrate the rebel stronghold while guarding lines of communication. The government attempted to resupply by air however the vast majority of those supplies landed in the hands of the rebels. With each piecemeal attack, Castro was able to concentrate his force, select the site of the engagement, and defeat his opponent by fire and isolation.

Many historians feel that the decisive battle of the government offensive occurred on the southern coast of the Sierra Maestra in July. The Cuban Army's plan called for a two pronged attack with one infantry battalion attacking on east side of Pico Turquino and one on the west. The first battalion commanded by Major Quevedo, a college associate of Fidel Castro, attacked from the east with the intent of driving the

rebel force to the west where a second battalion was to conduct an amphibious assault to trap and destroy the rebel army. This operation was to receive significant close air support and ship based resupply.<sup>94</sup>

The M26 game plan remained virtually unchanged. Major Quevedo's battalion was drawn deeper and deeper into the mountains by sniper fire until he found himself completely surrounded and cut off. Attempts to break out were useless as they were countered by ambushes and hasty minefields emplaced by the rebels along the route the battalion had passed. Attempts to resupply the force by air and ground failed.<sup>95</sup>

General Cantillo ordered the second battalion ashore to link up and continue the attack. However, by this time the amphibious ships were under surveillance from the shore and each attempt to land was met by intense .50 caliber machinegun fire supported by snipers. Major Quevedo and his battalion surrendered on 21 July. Major Quevedo and many of his soldiers joined the M26 Army.<sup>96</sup>

As a result of this campaign which concluded on 7 August, M26 gained a huge amount of arms and supplies that would allow them to triple in strength over the next few months. Some 400 Cuban Army POW's were turned over to the Red Cross well fed and cared for.<sup>97</sup> The Cuban Army had suffered a humiliating defeat and the notion that the rebel cause could not be defeated began to creep into the minds of many in the Cuban Army.

Raul Castro's Second Front was also active during this period consolidating the northeast portion of Oriente Province. On 26 June he attacked the U.S. owned Moa Bay mining company and took hostage ten U.S. citizens. Again on the 28th he seized 30 U.S. sailors and marines



traveling in a bus. This second kidnapping occurred just outside Guantanamo Naval Base.<sup>98</sup> These kidnappings served two purposes. First of all, although the U.S. had previously placed an embargo on arms sales to Batista, ammunition was still being sent into Cuba. Raul Castro demanded that all shipments cease. Second, and far more important, was the recognition by the United States of M26 as an official entity with which to negotiate. Raul Castro required a personal visit by a U.S. diplomat in rebel held territory as a condition to any release of hostages. The hostages were released after all conditions were met on 21 July.<sup>99</sup>

At this point in the revolution all that was required was a final push to topple the Batista regime. That push came in August 1958 as the M26 Army launched columns out of the Sierra Maestra to complete their control of Oriente Province and expand the war into central and western Cuba. Castro's counteroffensive strategy called for cutting the island in half with the belief that such an action would be sufficient to cause the final collapse of the Batista government. Castro's rebel forces numbered about 1500 versus a Cuban Army of about 30,000. Although in sheer numbers and fire power the rebels had no chance for success, they clearly held the moral high ground.

Castro's campaign plan called for Raul's Second Front forces and columns led by himself to attack to encircle and defeat the heavily fortified Cuban Army garrison in Santiago de Cuba. Columns led by Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos were to move out of Oriente Province through Las Villas Province and seize Santa Clara thereby effectively cutting the island in half. Guevara was to command all other rebels encountered in his movement to Santa Clara; this included the rebel

forces of the "Second Front of Escambray". If necessary then all forces would continue on to Havana.<sup>100</sup>

The advance of Guevara and Cienfuego was not swift nor easy. The Cuban Army attacked the advance continuously; although, the bulk of the attacks came at locations just vacated by the rebels. A small number of remote garrisons did fall into rebel hands, and with each the rebels gained much needed supplies. A fair number Cuban of Army soldiers deserted to join the M26 columns. The rebel radio in the Sierra Maestra portrayed these accomplishments as major victories achieved by a rebel army numbering in the thousands.

Upon reaching Santa Clara with some 300 rebels, Guevara devised a plan to isolate the city prior to attacking it directly. In an effort to break the siege, General Cantillo sent an armored train with 350 soldiers into Santa Clara. The rebels used the same tactics on the train as it had used against the Cuban Army battalions that had attempted to penetrate the Sierra Maestra. The train was allowed to penetrate the center of the city. Then the tracks were demolished both in front of and to the rear of the train. The rebels fired on the immobilized train until the commander seeing that escape was hopeless surrendered.<sup>101</sup> The garrison in Santa Clara surrendered shortly thereafter. Again the government made extensive use of air support but in a battle where rebels are operating in a largely civilian area, close air support is clearly counterproductive. On 31 December, Santa Clara in Las Villas Province was in the hands of M26 and the island of Cuba was effectively cut in half.

Although no major city in Oriente Province fell during this period, Cuban Army units garrisoned in those cities were no longer

capable of conducting military operations outside of their own static defense. A number of the smaller garrisons fell providing Castro a large number of weapons, including tanks, and new recruits. The groundwork was laid for capture of Santiago de Cuba and its military garrison.<sup>102</sup> With reports pouring in indicating that the country was rapidly falling into rebel hands, Batista fled the country on 1 January 1959.<sup>103</sup> For all intent and purpose the Cuban revolution came to an end on the morning of 2 January when Fidel Castro drove into Moncada Barracks and accepted the surrender of its commanding officer.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Cuban Revolution of the 1950's was a war fought literally for the hearts and minds of the people. One man, Fidel Castro, understood this; the other, Fulgencio Batista, did not. Although the terminology "hearts and minds of the people" was made trite with our own experience in the Viet Nam War, it does represent the basis for legitimate rule and, hence, the success of the Cuban Revolution.

The legitimacy of Batista's right to rule the people of Cuba constituted his political and military center of gravity. His inability to secure the urban area infrastructure against insurgent attacks; the failure of the Army to defeat a small paramilitary organization; the use of police and military terror against civilians and rebels alike in attempting to combat the revolution; and, the government's unwillingness to implement the economic reforms called for in the nation's constitution, all combined to destroy Batista's center of gravity and invalidate his right to rule the nation of Cuba. By way of analysis, I will briefly review some of the actions taken by both Batista and Castro that led to this destruction.

Fidel Castro based the legitimacy of his revolt not on some remote humanist, agrarian, or even Marxist philosophy but on the Cuban Constitution of 1940. Although Fulgencio Batista was the duly elected president of the government which formalized and instituted the 1940 Constitution, his capricious revocation of that Constitution in 1953 initiated the demise of democracy in Cuba and eventually led to his own fall from power. The Constitution's provisions of land reform, state provided health care, free education, and basic human rights were the

foundations upon which the Cuban people had based their expectations for the future. Two specific provisions of the constitution which had an important impact on public opinion centered on the elimination of capital punishment as means to maintain law and order and the commitment of the government to diversify the economy.

Over the course of several centuries, Cuba had developed a sugar based economy virtually to the exclusion of all other industry. Attempts to develop other commercial enterprises which could have facilitated expansion in the economy failed due to their inability to compete with U.S. manufactures who provided a major portion of all goods sold in Cuba. The sugar industry provided employment opportunity to basically two categories of Cubans: the very rich and the very poor. It was the emergence of an educated and socially mature; but, underemployed middle class that produced the impetus and manpower for revolutionary change. Castro's promises of reduced foreign influence, diversification of industry, and liberalization of the political process played well with the rising middle class. Castro also promised land redistribution to the peasants but this was never proven to be a major factor in his success. The primary point to remember is that Castro promised reforms based on a nationally accepted constitution while Batista desired above all else to maintain the status quo to the enrichment of wealthy Cuban and American business interests. These economic and political factors contributed to the erosion of Batista's legitimacy.

Throughout the period of 1953 until the end of 1958, there were two basic issues that consistently plagued Batista: maintaining law and order; and, conducting military operations against a rebel army. From

the attack on Moncada onward, Batista did not appear to have ever really grasped the differences.

After that attack at Moncada, the vast majority of individuals who took part, or were believed to have taken part, in what can be classified as terrorist attacks or sabotage either disappeared or were executed without any semblance of due process. Fidel and Raul Castro and only a few others, however, managed to survive. If the rebel enemy had been a clearly distinguishable individual, this may not have caused quite the public outcry that it did. However, it was the sons and daughters of the middle class that constituted the target of Batista's police and SIM. After each terrorist attack or act of sabotage, the police would sweep the surrounding areas and capture or kill any likely suspect. In the latter years, a likely suspect was any young person found on the street in the vicinity of the crime scene. None escaped "intense" interrogation and only a few escaped execution. This took on extreme proportions after such events as the Cienfuegos uprising during which approximately 200 rebels took part in the revolt but some 600 bodies were dumped in an unmarked grave; the assassination attempt on Batista in March 1957 and the power grid attack in Havana two months later.

Batista was clearly trapped by M26 in a lose/lose situation. M26 conducted an intense campaign to disrupt or destroy the infrastructure and industrial complexes of Cuba. In accomplishing these tactical missions, they were only partially successful but in viewing the overall effect, they were decisive in attaining their results. By late 1958 the people of Cuba viewed these attacks not so much as enemy successes but as the government's failure in securing their infrastructure necessities

such as transportation systems, utilities, and commerce. Compounding the problem was the government's reaction to such attacks which took a greater toll on the civilian population it claimed to protect than on the rebels themselves. The people of Cuba were losing at both ends. Had Cuba been a closed society such as Stalinist Russia, the repression and killing of civilians would have gone largely unnoticed; however, Cuba was basically an open society with close ties to the United States. The American press had a field day with the Batista government and is credited by some as having caused the American arms embargo of 1957. Adding to the flood of negative press was the M26 radio station broadcasting its message from the "Freed Territories" of Oriente Province. In protecting the population and territory of Cuba, Batista failed. In protecting the infrastructure of the country, Batista also failed.

The writers of Cuban history who strongly believe in Castro state that the decisive element of the Cuban Revolution was the M26 Army of the Sierra Maestra. Others state that Batista lost his legitimacy for the reasons cited in the proceeding paragraphs and Castro merely stepped in to fill the void. Regardless, the army of the Sierra Maestra was a factor in the overthrow of the Batista regime.

Starting with a group of 12 in the high country of the Sierra Maestra, Castro's M26 Army grew to around 1,500 in the very last days of 1958. How could an army of 1,500 defeat a national army of around 30,000? Simply stated, they didn't. The key to the M26 Army's ultimate success was their ability to avoid decisive combat action while presenting as image of invincibility and ultimate superiority. It was pure classic guerrilla warfare. Castro used hit and run tactics,

ambushes, booby traps, and sniping attacks to demoralize and confuse an enemy who was never quite sure of who or why he was fighting. The major engagements that were fought came about only on terms established by Castro. His careful treatment of POW's was also an effective weapon in establishing his own credibility as a humane leader with moral standards far above those demonstrated by Batista and his military leadership. Under Castro's direction the basic provisions of the constitution were implemented in the territories under control of the M26. He established free schools, health clinics, and cottage industries during a period when such services in the remainder of Cuba were diminishing rapidly.

The decisive military campaign came in May 1958 with Batista directing an all out offensive to destroy the M26 Army in the Sierra Maestra. When this campaign failed and Castro countered with his own offensive maneuver, all pretense of success against the insurgents was lost. In the minds of many, including those in the military, a rebel victory became inevitable. In defeating a small paramilitary organization, Batista failed.

The weight of each failure in combination with the others caused the government of Batista to collapse. Depending on the reader's view of history, Castro was either carried to power based on the momentum of his revolution or he was pulled in by virtue of the power vacuum that existed with Batista's departure. Regardless, he remains in power today and appears to have been quite successful in protecting his center of gravity. Apparently he learned his lesson well.



#### ENDNOTES

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